

# Communication

## Bulletin <sup>TM</sup> for Managers & Supervisors

A fast-read source of information to help managers communicate better within and between departments, twice a month.

April 1, 2020



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## How you can become worthy of the 'World's Best Boss' mug

### 6 habits best-in-class managers share

You're a good manager – maybe even the best in the group – but are you worthy of the coveted “World's Best Boss” mug?

Michael Scott of *The Office* fame supposedly earned it. But who really qualifies as the world's best?

Gallup researchers found out. The team dug deep into the data from its annual Exceptional Workplace Award to figure out who the most effective and respected leaders are – and, most importantly, what they have in common.

Here are six habits the best share:

#### 1. Communicate 'why'

Every manager communicates constantly – information up, down and across the chain

of command. The thing that 60% of them often fail to do: Let employees know *why* the information is important.

**Key:** Show employees the “big picture” with information you share – how it fits into the company, plus the impact the info will have on them or the impact their work will have on it.

#### 2. Be open to the team's ideas

Many bosses push their team to get the job done. World-class leaders pull their team to new-found successes.

One of the biggest reasons for the difference: The best bosses solicit ideas from and listen to their employees. Then they give employees

*Please see Best Boss ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## Do workers have to agree to diversity policy?

“John refuses to sign the annual diversity policy because he says it violates his religious principles,” said HR Manager Layne Jones.

“Right,” Supervisor Michelle Schmidt said. “He says his religion finds homosexuality to be deviant and that he can't sign anything that insists he ‘respect the differences of all employees.’”

“John works in your group, and we know one employee is gay,” Layne noted.

“Has John caused any problems because of that or made problems for anyone?”

“Maybe a minor complaint here or there that he can be annoying when he shares his religious beliefs,” said Michelle.

“But overall, John seems to work well with

everyone,” Michelle continued. “In fact, he could be on track for a promotion.”

#### Employee won't sign due to his beliefs

Layne pondered that for a moment and replied, “This is tricky. He hasn't caused any problems but refuses to agree with our diversity policy.”

“It's not tricky as far as I'm concerned,” Michelle said. “I want people in my group to respect one another. If he doesn't sign it, he's fired.”

John again refused to sign and was let go.

He eventually sued the company for wrongful termination and failure to accommodate his religious beliefs.

Did the company win?

This regular feature sharpens your thinking and helps keep both you and your firm out of trouble. It describes a real legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

*Make your decision, then please turn to Page 4 for the court's ruling.*

### The Purpose of Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors

Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors provides relevant and actionable business ideas to help managers and supervisors improve communication and increase effectiveness.

The Bulletin helps improve communication within and between departments, a major goal for most businesses seeking better performance.

All in a fast-read format, twice a month.

## Best Boss ...

(continued from Page 1)

opportunities to develop these ideas and encourage them to make it happen.

*Key:* Asking for their opinions and ideas makes employees feel connected. Act on what makes sense and explain why some ideas aren't feasible.

### 3. Admit and accept mistakes

World-class managers *aren't* know-it-alls. They admit when they're wrong or have made a mistake. More importantly, they create an environment where employees are comfortable making – and learning from – mistakes.

*Key:* Admit wrongs, correct them and share what you've learned. Then employees will see mistakes are part of continual improvement, not something to be feared or ashamed of.

### 4. Uncover motivational needs

Even great bosses can't fully control employees' compensation. But the best know employees aren't motivated to show up or inspired to do great work by money alone. They get to know what motivates their employees and continually give that to them.

*Key:* Find ways to frame work so it's uniquely compelling to each employee based on what you learn

motivates them.

*Key 2:* Regularly ask questions to uncover what motivates them – perhaps challenging work, opportunities to collaborate, career advancement – because you'll want to change with their evolving needs.

### 5. Recognize and celebrate the team

The best managers do more than pat employees on the back and say, "Good job." They explain *why* efforts matter and celebrate excellence. Two-thirds of employees say they haven't been recognized or praised for good work in the last week, Gallup says. *The other third work for world-class bosses!*

*Key:* Even if you have limited resources to reward employees, you can praise good work every day, send motivational messages every week and celebrate excellence with public recognition and applause every month.

### 6. Foster success in and out of work

Great bosses care about their employees' success at work *and* outside of work. They recognize that work impacts personal lives, and sometimes life trumps the job, so they help employees balance both. On the job, the best managers help employees identify and prepare for opportunities to advance.

*Key:* Be on the lookout for areas where you can help employees excel in life and work.

## TECH CORNER

### Warning: Firms exposed to pricey ransomware attacks

The cyberattack known as ransomware cost companies more than \$7.5 billion in 2019.

And even if your company doesn't pay for your data that's held hostage – and experts strongly urge you not to pay hackers their ransom demands – you'll still have to contend with downtime and lost data.

### What the experts recommend

Here are three steps the FBI advises to reduce ransomware risks:

1. **Keep users trained.** Crooks can't

hit you with ransomware if they can't gain access. Employees may need reminders about not opening suspicious looking emails.

2. **Develop a "least privilege" mentality.** You want each individual to have the bare minimum level of access he or she needs to do their jobs.
3. **Make sure IT employs best practices to reduce exposure to and damage from ransomware attacks.** The FBI put out a list of technical suggestions – it's worth reading over to be on the safe side.

*Source:* [ic3.gov/media/2019/191002.aspx](https://ic3.gov/media/2019/191002.aspx)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### Ike's advice to Kennedy for making big decisions

Presidents Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower and John Kennedy weren't exactly friendly. But the pair had to talk in the midst of the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Eisenhower had planned it, Kennedy executed it. In those talks, Ike gave his successor advice any leader can use: Debate and deliberate for big decisions.

Ike asked if Kennedy met individually with aides on the military plan or if the group debated and deliberated together. Kennedy admitted he took advice and made the decision.

It's the leader's decision, but a meeting of the minds offers a full view of pros and cons, Ike said. Essentials:

- **Gather** experts and people with respected insight.
- **Set rules.** Let them know the issue and need for professional debate on facts, not personal opinions.
- **Decide.** The leader gets final word.

*Source:* John Baldoni, *SmartBriefs*, [tinyurl.com/debate473](https://tinyurl.com/debate473)

### How to take criticism well

No one likes to be criticized. But it's tough to improve without knowing or understanding weaknesses.

So when you receive criticism from a boss, colleague or employee, try to:

- **Be prepared.** Ready responses for criticism so you avoid the natural reaction to get defensive. For instance, plan to paraphrase first.
- **Calibrate.** Get a feel for the degree of importance or urgency to figure out if it's something you need to fix or just something to consider. Ask, "On a scale of one to 10, how frustrated are you about this?"
- **Count.** Is it a single, low-priority criticism? Or a repeated offense? Respond and react accordingly.
- **Apply it to your role.** Most criticism is about the role, not the person, so make the solution about that, too.
- **Take care.** Criticism – especially deep or constant – hurts. Make a point to do things you enjoy to rebound and relax.

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/criticism472](https://tinyurl.com/criticism472)

## Real Problems, Real Solutions

Our subscribers come from a broad range of organizations, large and small. In this regular networking feature, three of them share their successes in improving workplace communication.

### 1 Weekly personal visit is key to communication

We're in an industry that's been hit hard in the past decade.

No kidding – many of our competitors have gone into bankruptcy or just shut their doors.

But I'm proud to say that we've managed to thrive.

I believe one of the biggest reasons is an old-fashioned communication tool I – and some of my colleagues – continue to use: weekly personal visits with employees and customers.

To me, it's the best day of the week!

I usually visit different locations on Fridays and spend hours talking

to employees on the front line and the customers they help.

#### Understand my people better

It's effective because I get a feel for employees' demands and hear what they like and don't like. I also see what customers want and don't want.

I take that information to my office and use it to make better decisions to keep employees and customers happy. And our business is thriving.

*(Jim Boscov, Chairman and CEO, Boscovs, shared this success in The Morning Call)*

### 2 We found out what benefits folks wanted

When I first joined my company, I spent 90 days digging in and learning how we communicated with people.

I launched a Total Well-Being survey and discovered associates weren't receiving communications in an adequate time period. They couldn't easily navigate and find information they needed.

#### Enrollment spiked overnight

We started from scratch and established our "Employees as Customer No. 1" initiative.

Every quarter's themed with a focus on wealth, health and lifestyle, and then the fourth quarter focuses on open enrollment season.

As a result, we saw a 72% adoption rate into our high deductible health plan during the 2019 open enrollment period, well above the national average of 25% to 30%.

We've also seen a 27% increase in employee contributions to Health Savings Plans.

*(Misty Guinn, Director, Benefits & Wellness, Benefitfocus, Charleston, SC)*

### 3 Frequent breaks didn't hurt productivity

Some of our workers' jobs are repetitive and tedious. And I could see the grind taking a toll on them.

I couldn't change what the workers were doing in their jobs.

But I figured short, frequent breaks would make it easier for them to stay focused and positive.

#### Break time is relax time

I started walking around and talking to workers, encouraging them to take quick breaks.

But I also wanted to make the time uplifting.

To do that, I looked for funny stories online to share with workers during their breaks.

That quick laugh lifted their spirits and made the day a little easier. It also got conversation going to take their minds off work.

The frequent breaks were definitely worthwhile. Employees were happier.

And the breaks were short enough that they didn't affect productivity.

*(Rachel Glowacki, Quality Manager, INX International, Charlotte, NC)*



#### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ We don't want bad reviews: How can we stop them?

**Question:** We don't want any scathing reviews on employment sites such as Glassdoor. Can we ask staff to follow the rule: *If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all?*

**Answer:** That's a bad idea, according to advice recently released in a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) memo.

It stemmed from an employer that required employees to sign an agreement that they wouldn't criticize or disparage the company online.

That essentially interferes with employees' rights under the National Labor Relations Act. Those rights include (but aren't limited to) the freedom to act together to improve their pay and/or working circumstances.

If one employee or a group of them wants to gripe on an employer review site, they should be able to do it, the NLRB says.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/s6otd9y](https://tinyurl.com/s6otd9y)

#### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ One-liners appropriate for work

Often, all it takes to convey the right message is one line.

To prove that, here are a few one-liners appropriate for work:

- When an employment application asks who is to be notified in case of emergency, I always write, "a very good doctor."
- Nothing ruins a Friday more than an understanding that today is Tuesday.
- The proper way to use a stress ball is to throw it at the last person who upset you.
- I get plenty of exercise – jumping to conclusions, pushing my luck and dodging deadlines.
- A clean desk is a sign of a cluttered desk drawer.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/oneline473](https://tinyurl.com/oneline473)

## COMMUNICATION NEWS

## How to survive or clean up a toxic workplace

**T**oxic work environments – where gossip, negativity, undermining and backstabbing run rampant – take a toll on mental health.

Lolly Daskal, researcher and author of *The Leadership Gap*, suggests these six ways to survive and/or fumigate a toxic workplace:

### Draw a line

**Maintain boundaries.** Let others know what's not acceptable to you. If you draw the line on gossip, they won't involve you.

**Build connections with positive co-workers.** Turn to those you trust, support and believe.

**Avoid drama.** Excuse yourself from

conversations that go in a dramatic direction. People will learn you don't engage.

**Stay focused on the job.** Shut out others – even if you have to book a conference room – and do your best work while they participate in toxic behavior.

**Leave issues at work.** If or when the toxins get to you, leave it behind when you head home. Focus on positive people and experiences outside of work.

**Lead from within.** Be good to yourself when others aren't good. Recognize when it's time to cut ties with toxic colleagues.

*Source: [tinyurl.com/toxic473](http://tinyurl.com/toxic473)*

## Getting useful references from job candidates: Try this step

**C**hecking references for job candidates can seem like a waste of time, especially with all the canned responses you can get.

But there are ways of getting real information from references.

### Better to choose who you contact

Tip: You pick the references.

After interviewing the candidate, ask if you can speak to former bosses of your choosing.

This may give you a more honest appraisal of the candidate, instead of giving you the one

they've fashioned you to see.

Be wary if candidates say they have no way of getting in contact with them.

Some firms may have a policy banning them from giving references.

Other excuses are more suspect.

Also: Try to read between the lines when talking to references.

Sometimes it's not always what a former boss says, but what's left. A lack of successes cited in a previous job is obviously a red flag.

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company lost when the court found the employee had been unfairly fired for his religious beliefs.

The ruling hinged on the finding that he had never discriminated against or mistreated gays, despite his religious beliefs.

Ordering him to sign an agreement that was counter to his beliefs was evidence the supervisor went too far to promote the company's diversity position.

What mattered most, the court noted, was whether the employee's religious beliefs resulted in his discriminating against others.

As long as the employee's religion didn't affect business and the treatment of other workers, the

supervisor should have accommodated the belief and not required the agreement be signed.

### Religious beliefs trump diversity policy

This company went too far in making acceptance of diversity a condition of employment. An individual can refuse to sign a policy if it conflicts with his religious beliefs.

It's always better to deal with cases of discrimination or harassment as they come along, and focus on the individuals involved, to promote a tolerant and productive workplace.

(Based on *Buonanno v. AT&T Broadband*. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

**A**nd now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good.

– John Steinbeck

**W**henever it feels uncomfortable to tell the truth, that's often the most important time to tell it.

– Jennifer Lopez

**W**e think, mistakenly, that success is the result of the amount of time we put in at work, instead of the quality of time we put in.

– Arianna Huffington

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